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STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE: SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES OR REGIONS

Assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 50/58 A of 12 December 1995, the General Assembly, inter alia, took note of the progress made by the Liberian parties at Abuja, Nigeria, towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict through the induction of a Council of State and the installation of the second Liberian National Transitional Government.

2. The Assembly called upon Member States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to continue to provide Liberia with technical, financial and other assistance for the repatriation and resettlement of Liberian refugees, returnees and displaced persons and the rehabilitation of combatants. In the same vein, it reiterated its appeal to the international community to contribute generously to the Trust Fund for Liberia, established by the Secretary-General, to assist the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to fulfil its mandate and also to provide assistance for the reconstruction of Liberia.

3. Furthermore, the Assembly emphasized the urgent need for all parties and factions in Liberia to respect fully the security and safety of all personnel of the United Nations, its specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and ECOMOG by ensuring their complete freedom of movement throughout Liberia and to take all measures necessary to create an atmosphere conducive to the successful resolution of the conflict.

4. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to mobilize all possible assistance within the United Nations system to help the Government of Liberia in its reconstruction and development efforts; to undertake, when conditions permit, in close collaboration with the authorities of Liberia, an overall assessment of needs, with the objective of holding a round-table conference of donors for the reconstruction and development of Liberia; and to report to it at its fifty-first session on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

5. Pursuant to that resolution, the present report describes the activities of the humanitarian assistance community in Liberia in fulfilling those goals since the issuance of the previous report of the Secretary-General (A/50/522) in October 1995.

II. OVERVIEW OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE EFFORTS

6. During the period under review, the United Nations has maintained its efforts towards supporting the peace process in Liberia, delivering humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict, catering to the emergency needs of displaced persons, accessing populations cut off behind front lines and formulating a comprehensive non-targeted reintegration programme for refugees, displaced persons and ex-combatants. Prior to the Abuja Agreement in August 1995, the emphasis had been on negotiating access to populations trapped behind lines of combat. After the Agreement, priorities shifted to (a) providing humanitarian assistance to populations in the newly accessed

areas; (b) reorienting relief programmes towards developmental programmes; (c) liaising with the new Government; (d) meeting emergency needs of civilians displaced by persistent fighting between the factions in spite of their agreement to a ceasefire; and (e) formulating plans to ensure the success of the expected demobilization, repatriation and resettlement of Liberians affected by the war.

7. Following the Peace Agreement, significant and successful efforts were made to expand humanitarian activities throughout Liberia. For instance, in September and November 1995, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations accessed previously inaccessible areas in Grand Gedeh, Sinoe and Lofa counties. Other encouraging developments were also under way.

8. With this background, the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office was established in Liberia and a United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator appointed following consultation among members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and key donors. The Coordinator arrived in Liberia in late November 1995. The mandate and role of the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office and the Coordinator are derived from both the General Assembly resolution that established the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (resolution 46/182) and the thirteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on Liberia (S/1995/881). The Coordinator functions under the overall authority of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and reports directly to the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator.

9. The primary function of the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office is to facilitate and ensure the quick, effective and well-coordinated provision of humanitarian assistance to those affected by the war, and to be directly responsible for the organization and delivery of services for the demobilization of combatants and coordinating programmes to facilitate their return to productive civilian life in society. The Office consists of two units: a Humanitarian Assistance Unit, which supports the Coordinator in carrying out his coordination duties, and a Demobilization and Reintegration Unit, which was to implement the demobilization process and facilitate the initial stages of reintegration. The Office has improved coordination of the delivery of humanitarian assistance, increased the flow, sharing and dissemination of information, contributed to the expansion of humanitarian assistance activities to hitherto inaccessible areas, initiated rapid responses to emergencies, carried out humanitarian advocacy and defended the interests of the humanitarian community.

10. During the autumn of 1995, the Liberian National Transitional Government established three commissions to work with the humanitarian assistance community: the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission, to deal with the resettlement of refugees and displaced persons; the National Disarmament and Demobilization Commission, to be responsible for all activities aimed at the disarmament and demobilization of combatants, and the National Readjustment Commission, to deal with those disabled or affected by the war. Additionally, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs was charged with the responsibility for the coordination of external assistance as well as the development and subsequent implementation of the reintegration programme aimed at all war-affected Liberians.

11. On 27 October 1995, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs convened a Conference on Assistance to Liberia in New York, under the joint chairmanship of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Chairman of ECOWAS, and the Chairman of the Liberian Council of State. The aim of the Conference was to mobilize resources to support the peace process and the humanitarian efforts. The Conference was attended by representatives of international and regional organizations, donors and other institutions.

12. After the unsuccessful demobilization exercise in 1994, a new disarmament and demobilization plan was finalized by the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) and presented to the Council of State for endorsement in the autumn of 1995. Furthermore, a core group of the humanitarian assistance community, comprising the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and United Nations agencies, in collaboration with the Government, drew up a non-targeted community-based reintegration programme. The strategy called for dividing the country into 13 Area Reintegration and Development Units/Centres. The Units/Centres were to be managed by non-governmental organizations, working together with local authorities under the overall authority of a national body. Funds to support this programme were to come from United Nations funding agencies, USAID, the European Union and the Government of France.

13. These positive developments were, however, taking place against a backdrop of increasing political instability and insecurity. The failure of the warring factions to cease fire and disengage, coupled with delays in the disarmament process and the poor dissemination of information to the fighters, sustained a volatile environment for humanitarian assistance. On 11 October 1995, a Médecins sans frontières (France) (MSF(F)) vehicle was seized at Kakata and the occupants harassed. On 27 December, an entire Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) convoy of six vehicles and cargo was seized at Zorzor while en route to Voinjama, Lofa county. The OXFAM staff were released unharmed, and the vehicles were returned 10 days later, after their contents had been looted. This incident effectively stopped further relief convoys to Lofa county. On 10 February 1996, another OXFAM/MSF(F) convoy, destined for Greenville, Sinoe county, was held up by Liberian Peace Council (LPC) fighters at Zwedru. The staff were detained, the vehicle taken and the contents looted. Through the interventions of the Special Representative and the Humanitarian Coordinator their release was secured. On 19 and 21 February 1996, World Vision International (WVI) convoys were held up at Blodialle, Nimba county, by fighters of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and released after several hours. These incidents frustrated the continued delivery of humanitarian assistance to the newly accessed areas of the north and south-east.

14. In addition to the harassment of relief workers, persistent ceasefire violations and the general deterioration of security continued to cause civilian populations to shift, thereby compounding the displaced persons' problem. The fighting that broke out between ECOMOG and elements of General Roosevelt Johnson's wing of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO-J) at Tubmanburg on 28 December 1995 forced several civilians, including Sierra Leonean refugees in the area, to flee towards Monrovia and to the Po River area. Furthermore, another skirmish between ECOMOG and ULIMO-J in the Todee district in January, and the takeover of the towns of Todee, Kakata

and Bong Mines by NPFL from ULIMO-J in March, sent thousands of civilians and displaced persons in those areas fleeing to Monrovia. In all cases, the humanitarian assistance community, together with the government agency, the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission, made arrangements to meet the needs of these newly displaced persons.

15. In Tubmanburg, continued instability and resumption of fighting in March cut off more than 30,000 people from receiving relief aid. The last food convoy reached the city on 17 January 1996. Since then, the area has remained inaccessible. Furthermore, the continued tensions and fighting between the two wings of ULIMO in Grand Cape Mount county have also cut off thousands of persons, including 35,000 Sierra Leonean refugees, from relief assistance. In March 1996, in response to the sufferings of internally displaced persons and refugees, the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office facilitated an airlift of humanitarian assistance by, in particular, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), using ECOMOG helicopters donated by the United States of America. With the subsequent withdrawal of ECOMOG from the towns of Bo, Sinje and Tieni later in March, Grand Cape Mount county once again became inaccessible to the humanitarian assistance community. Escapees from the area report serious humanitarian problems. Furthermore, the presence that the humanitarian assistance community had established in Zwedru and Greenville has all but been abandoned owing to continuing insecurity in the area. Only a token presence exists in Buchanan for the same reason.

16. The most serious threat to the peace process and humanitarian operations in Liberia was the fighting that broke out in Monrovia on 6 April 1996, shattering the sanctity of the city as a safe haven. While the fighting was sparked off by the attempted arrest of General Roosevelt Johnson, leader of ULIMO-J, by the Liberian National Transitional Government, the underlying causes run much deeper. Fighters of NPFL and General Alhaji Kromah's wing of ULIMO (ULIMO-K) - so-called "government forces" - and ULIMO-J and its allies, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), LPC and the Lofa Defence Force (LDF), moved into the city and engaged in the widespread looting of private and public property. The city remained locked in a state of combat for days. Civilians were caught in the crossfire and many lost their lives. The Ministry of Health estimates that about 3,000 people might have lost their lives in the fighting, and more than 50 per cent of the town's nearly 800,000 people have become displaced.

17. It can safely be stated that all humanitarian organizations, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, UNOMIL and government offices, as well as shops and other commercial establishments, were systematically looted by fighters of all factions. Although humanitarian personnel were not targeted, many were harassed and had their personal belongings looted. Almost all expatriate staff of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations were evacuated and many of their local staff fled to other countries. With their facilities and warehouses looted and most of their staff gone, the humanitarian assistance community has been seriously constrained in effectively carrying out relief work. Despite these constraints and the high security risk, United Nations agencies and the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office remained in Monrovia to monitor and coordinate the delivery of much-needed relief assistance. Food distribution commenced on 14 April.

18. Since the ceasefire brokered by ECOWAS and the United Nations on 31 May, expatriate staff of the major relief agencies are gradually re-establishing their presence in Liberia. Humanitarian activities have, however, been minimal owing to a dire shortage of supplies and apprehension about the consequences of possible renewed fighting. Despite these obvious limitations, relief supplies are reaching the needy both inside and outside Monrovia. On 18 May, an assessment mission went to Ganta, Nimba county, followed by another assessment mission that travelled to Voinjama, Lofa county, on 7 June. Upon the findings of the latter, a relief convoy of 19 trucks was dispatched to the area by WFP on 13 June. Cross-border operations from Côte d'Ivoire to Nimba and Bong counties have continued through which food, seeds and other relief items were delivered. Buchanan was kept supplied with food and other items by WFP and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) by sea.

19. The fighting on 6 April has had a profound, detrimental impact on the humanitarian assistance community and their operations in Liberia. Coming at a time when the humanitarian community was braced for a massive operation in the hinterland, the incident compelled the community to re-examine its involvement in the Liberian humanitarian tragedy. The persistent looting of the resources of the community over the past six years has no doubt served to strengthen the warring factions. Consequently, all members of the international non-governmental organization community in Liberia took a collective stand to limit their activities to only life-saving activities until a safe working environment was restored. United Nations agencies also agreed on a common position, involving only essential services. It was also agreed that future operations would be guided strictly by the Principles and Protocols of Humanitarian Operations adopted by both international non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies in the summer of 1995. On 12 July 1996, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee reaffirmed its support for these Principles and Protocols. A document on the mechanism for ensuring compliance with the Principles and Protocols of Humanitarian Operations has been prepared by all members of the international humanitarian community in Liberia consequent to the crisis. Since the crisis in April and May, ECOWAS has convened high-level meetings to address the situation in Liberia.

III. SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS

A. Assistance for peace monitoring

20. Since the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General in October 1992 and the establishment of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia in September 1993, the United Nations has continued to undertake initiatives to promote the peace process. Following the signing of the Abuja Agreement on 19 August 1995, the Secretary-General dispatched a technical team to Liberia in September 1995 to consult with the Liberian leaders, ECOWAS and other interested parties, to review ways in which UNOMIL could assist the implementation of the Agreement, including a revised concept of operations for the Mission. Based on the recommendations of the Secretary-General in his report of 23 October 1995 (S/1995/881), the Security Council, by its resolution 1020 (1995) of 10 November 1995, adjusted the mandate of UNOMIL, entrusting the Mission with the following tasks: (a) to exercise its good offices to support

the efforts of ECOWAS and the Liberian National Transitional Government to implement the peace process; (b) to investigate ceasefire violations; (c) to monitor other military provisions of the peace agreements, including disarmament and observance of the arms embargo; (d) to assist, as appropriate, in the disarmament of combatants; (e) to support humanitarian activities; (f) to investigate and report on human rights violations; and (g) to observe and verify the election process. Most recently, the Security Council, in its resolution 1071 (1996), extended the mandate of UNOMIL to 30 November 1996.

21. The effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the combatants remained a key element in the peace process. The Demobilization and Reintegration Unit of the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office was charged with the direct implementation of the programme. A budget of US$ 8 million was approved for the demobilization programme. To fulfil its peacekeeping role (including disarmament), ECOMOG had estimated a troop requirement of 12,000 soldiers. As of July 1996, ECOMOG's troop strength was only 7,269. With the assistance of UNOMIL, a budget of US$ 93 million was prepared for ECOMOG to carry out the operation.

22. The Conference on Assistance to Liberia, held in New York on 27 October 1995 (para. 11 above) focused on the support required for the implementation of the Abuja Agreement, including humanitarian assistance, disarmament and demobilization processes, rehabilitation and recovery, as well as support for ECOMOG. More than 100 participants, including representatives of Member States, the European Union, the Organization of African Unity, United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions attended the Conference. A total of US$ 145.7 million was pledged for humanitarian assistance, demobilization and reintegration. The United States of America, among others, pledged $10 million for logistical support to ECOMOG. The relatively low contribution to ECOMOG and the consequent lack of resources has had a significant impact on its deployment in the hinterland and may have contributed to the delay in the implementation of the peace process. The leadership of ECOWAS expressed its disappointment at the meagre resources allocated for the assistance of ECOMOG.

23. By mid-October 1995, a Demobilization and Reintegration Task Force instituted by the Special Representative in February 1995, with the participation of ECOMOG, the Liberian National Transitional Government, United Nations agencies, donors and non-governmental organizations, had completed a draft demobilization plan. On the basis of consultations, a list of proposed assembly (disarmament) sites and the number of combatants belonging to each faction was compiled. In this regard, some 60,000 combatants were expected to be disarmed and demobilized, comprising 25,000 NPFL; 12,460 ULIMO-K; 8,734 AFL; 7,776 ULIMO-J; 4,650 LPC and 750 LDF combatants. In November, UNOMIL and ECOMOG began undertaking joint reconnaissance missions to the proposed disarmament centres. In the same month, the disarmament and demobilization plan, jointly approved by UNOMIL and ECOMOG, was forwarded to the Council of State for consideration and endorsement. In the light of substantial changes proposed by the Liberian National Transitional Government, a revised plan was finalized by March 1996 following extensive consultation among the major partners in the peace process.

24. Throughout this period, the United Nations exerted efforts to keep the peace process on track. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General seized every opportunity to encourage the warring faction leaders to keep their commitment to the peace process. During his visit to Liberia, on 29 November 1995, the Secretary-General re-emphasized the need to adhere to the Abuja Agreement and underscored the responsibility of the Liberian leaders to bring about an end to the conflict.

25. The failure of the warring factions to disengage as required by the Agreement, the continued ceasefire violations by all factions, the lack of ECOMOG resources for timely deployment, the discord among the factional leaders and the break-up of ULIMO-J, culminated in the eruption of fighting in Monrovia on 6 April 1996. The fighting in Monrovia, sparked by the stand-off between ULIMO-J leader Roosevelt Johnson and the Council of State, led to massive destruction of central Monrovia and the serious derailment of the Abuja Agreement.

26. Despite this serious setback, efforts to sustain the peace process in Liberia continued. Even as fighting raged in Monrovia, efforts were exerted by UNOMIL, ECOWAS and resident ambassadors to achieve a cessation of hostilities in the city. Meanwhile, on 18 April, the Secretary-General dispatched a Special Envoy, Mr. James O. C. Jonah, to Monrovia to assess the situation and consult with the leadership of ECOWAS regarding the implementation of the Abuja Agreement. On 7 May, the ECOWAS Committee of Nine met at Accra and adopted a Mechanism for Returning Liberia to the Abuja Agreement. Under this Mechanism, ECOWAS called on the parties to adhere to the Abuja Agreement, restore the ceasefire, withdraw fighters from Monrovia, guarantee free movement for civilians, and return ECOMOG weapons and vehicles and other equipment looted from UNOMIL, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. At the ECOWAS summit, on 26 and 27 July 1996, the west African States noted that the Accra Mechanism had only been partially implemented. Further and more detailed discussion of Liberia was deferred to a special session of the ECOWAS Committee of Nine, to be held at Abuja before 18 August. However, subsequent to the summit at Abuja, all faction leaders on the Council of State announced their commitment to cease hostilities and commence disarmament immediately, completing the exercise by 30 September 1996. The outcome of these commitments and their consequences for the international community's involvement in Liberia are not yet clear.

B. Initiatives for rehabilitation, reconstruction and national reconciliation

27. Rehabilitation efforts in Liberia have to be undertaken against a backdrop of a totally devastated economic sector and a population of which more than 60 per cent have been displaced, as well as a serious breakdown of community structures and deteriorating community cohesion. Traditional family and community support systems have been seriously disrupted leading to a major shift in priorities from development to survival. Therefore, it is important to devise a system that would increase cohesion, security and self-reliance.

28. In anticipation of the implementation of the peace agreements, the humanitarian assistance community had undertaken cautious initiatives towards rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation. Relief programmes were being reprogrammed to suit rehabilitation needs in the safe havens. One example was a programme set up jointly by WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the European Union to establish small agricultural projects in the vicinity of Monrovia and at other major displaced persons' camps as a way of attracting the population away from those crowded centres, enabling them to produce part of their food and hence reduce reliance on relief handouts. An integral and significant part of this plan was the policy to phase out general food distribution in Monrovia and elsewhere in Liberia and the substitution of rice with bulgar wheat so as not to compete with locally produced rice.

29. After the Abuja Agreement, the emphasis shifted to developing a comprehensive strategy for the integration of the war-affected population. To this end, a non-targeted resettlement/reintegration plan was drawn up wherein the food-for-work micro-project methodology would be used to respond to the needs of community initiatives. The plan called for food-for-work micro-projects in agricultural production and school and vulnerable group feeding, to be directed towards resettlement areas to stimulate and support spontaneous and rapid resettlement in addition to other needed non-food assistance.

30. In the meantime, other concrete steps were being taken for the general economic recovery of Liberia. Pursuant to the recommendation of the Conference on Assistance to Liberia, held in New York on 27 October 1995, a special consultative meeting was to be held on Liberia with the objective of harmonizing planning, programming and financing for recovery interventions. For this purpose, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/World Bank mission visited the country in March and established core teams of national consultants to undertake rapid technical assessments in all critical development sectors. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also sent two missions to Liberia to review the tax system and expenditure management procedure. The missions recommended a technical assistance programme to improve Liberia's fiscal performance. Furthermore, the African Development Bank indicated its interest in assisting Liberia in debt management. These efforts were suspended and the special consultative meeting was not held owing to the outbreak of fighting in April.

31. At the microeconomic level, WFP continued its institution-strengthening programme through food-for-work schemes. A substantial amount of the food-for-work schemes was used for reopening roads and for constructing bridges to newly accessed areas. Incentives in the form of food for work were also made available to educational and medical staff. A total of 82 micro-projects, ranging from small loans to women to reconstruction of schools, clinics, bridges, wells, shelters, logistics and latrines, had been completed or were under implementation by the United Nations Office for Project Services, funded by UNDP and other donors. These projects were expected to serve as the building blocks for the overall recovery of the Liberian economy. The UNHCR strategy was directed towards small-scale income-generating activities and infrastructure rehabilitation around refugee settlements with a view to making them self-

reliant. FAO continued to identify and formulate projects aimed at the rehabilitation and revitalization of the agricultural sector, with the ultimate goal of achieving food security. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) continued their efforts in the rehabilitation of education and health infrastructures, while UNDP, together with the Liberian National Transitional Government and the International Labour Organization (ILO), agreed to implement a US$ 1 million project to train ex-combatants. Unfortunately, many of these initiatives have been derailed, some irreparably, by the recent fighting in Monrovia.

IV. SECTORAL REVIEW OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

A. Food and nutrition

32. During the course of 1995, about 63,000 metric tons of assorted food commodities were distributed to 1.5 million beneficiaries, including 890,000 residing in displaced persons' and refugee shelters. However, towards the end of 1995 and the beginning of 1996, when peace seemed to be within reach, WFP, in consultation with relevant partners, sought to reduce the level of dependence on relief food and to promote self-reliance through the resettlement of internally and externally displaced persons into rural areas where they could engage in production activities and the promotion of smallholder food security. In this context, the following measures were initiated to stimulate self-reliance along a sustained growth path during the first quarter of 1996: (a) phasing out the general distribution of food in Monrovia and its environs and targeting vulnerable people through institutions (hospitals, churches, disabled houses etc.); (b) facilitating the resettlement of ex-combatants, returnees and displaced persons in relatively secure areas by extending emergency food assistance along with the provision of seeds and tools; this was to be followed by the development of resettlement micro-projects and the rehabilitation of social and agricultural infrastructure through food-for-work activities; (c) expanding school and vulnerable group feeding programmes in resettlement areas; and (d) providing a safety net for the poor through community-based activities and continuing targeted feeding programmes.

33. Food distribution continues to be made through WFP and its implementing non-governmental organization partners. WFP and Catholic Relief Services signed a memorandum of understanding, in which geographical areas were identified for each agency to implement and monitor food aid activities. The understanding ensures the efficient utilization of resources and enhances accountability to donors and beneficiaries. In order to increase the efficiency of delivery in the shelters, an updating of beneficiaries was conducted in different shelters in the second half of January 1996. This exercise was also carried out to reflect the inward and outward movement of the population from these shelters.

34. An emergency school feeding programme was also under implementation and had been expanded to Grand Gedeh, Upper Lofa and other accessible counties. The objective was to enhance the nutritional status of school-age children, increase enrolment rates and improve attendance. Until recently, 235,000 students in schools located in Monrovia, Margibi, Grand Bassa, Bomi, Cape Mount, Nimba and Bong counties were provided with meals on each schoolday. At the same time,

19,000 teachers and school workers were included in food-for-work activities. This programme contributed to the normalization of life, especially in Monrovia. The target for 1996 was to expand food assistance to 300,000 pupils as well as to 24,000 teachers and support staff.

35. WFP participated in drawing up a framework for the reintegration of combatants by the humanitarian assistance community. In the framework, food for work was to continue for at least two years in the resettlement phase. Food assistance was to be provided for returning refugees or displaced persons as had been done with those who recently returned to Nimba and Grand Gedeh counties. Reconstruction and rehabilitation of public infrastructures, including schools, health posts and roads, were to be undertaken through food-for-work programmes.

36. However, most of these activities and plans have been aborted owing to the recent fighting that broke out in Monrovia on 6 April. As a result, WFP, in collaboration with six implementing partners, switched back to relief activities and conducted a needs-assessment survey in the accessible parts of Monrovia. Based on the immediate needs identified, five feeding categories were immediately defined and programmes put into effect: (a) vulnerable group feeding programmes, under which 125 metric tons of assorted food commodities were provided for hospital in-patients, orphanages, the elderly, unaccompanied children and the handicapped; (b) expanded targeted feeding programmes, under which 3,400 metric tons of assorted foods were distributed to 640,000 beneficiaries as a life-saving measure for populations trapped on Bushrod Island, Upper Caldwell and New Kru Town; (c) programmes for refugees and the newly displaced, under which 4,253 metric tons were distributed to 212,798 beneficiaries; (d) programmes of food for work for the removal of corpses from streets, general sanitation, hospital workers, telecommunications workers, airport clean-up crews and security guards at the port; (e) up-country deliveries to places such as Buchanan, Kakata, Suehn, Gbarnga and Voinjama.

37. Food aid is certainly not a panacea and cannot overcome all the problems of war-affected persons. In this respect, WFP participated actively in inter-agency assessment missions with other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and relevant government agencies to minimize this means as a solution. Additionally, as part of its duties to its partners, WFP chartered two ocean-going vessels that shuttle between Freetown and Monrovia transporting fuel, food, medicine and other facilities required by the humanitarian assistance community. One of the boats is always anchored in Monrovia to facilitate the emergency evacuation of international United Nations staff should that be necessary.

B. Agriculture

38. In the past year, FAO continued its efforts in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, non-governmental organizations and donor organizations in the identification and formulation of projects aimed at the rehabilitation and revitalization of the agricultural sector. In this regard, FAO, assisted by UNDP, fielded a team of national consultants to prepare a national food security strategy. A national workshop on this strategy was organized in collaboration with UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture.

39. FAO continued to provide technical assistance by offering training to non-governmental organizations, farmers and the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture in several areas, including crop husbandry, fertilization and the production and processing of cassava tubers. Through its non-governmental organization implementing partners - Africare, CRS and the Lutheran World Service (LWS) - FAO continued to provide agricultural inputs such as seeds, tools, fertilizers, and pesticides and advice to farmers, particularly in newly accessible areas. Owing to these efforts, there has been a perceptible growth in the production of vegetables and rice around Monrovia. FAO has also provided fishing gear to fishermen and has assisted those who had started livestock industries. Most of the above activities were suspended because of the outbreak of fighting on 6 April.

C. Health and medical care

40. WHO, UNICEF, the Ministry of Health and national and international non-governmental organizations have continued their efforts to provide curative and preventive health care to accessible parts of the country. They have also endeavoured to rehabilitate the entire health sector. These efforts, however, have repeatedly been interrupted by emergencies such as the outbreak of epidemics or continued fighting among the factions. For example, when fighting broke out in Tubmanburg, Bomi county, in December 1995, WHO dispatched two health teams to attend to the needs of the escapees from the area. Likewise, when fighting broke out in Monrovia, WHO and its implementing partners succeeded in keeping the five referral hospitals open, with supplies, throughout the fighting. These interruptions, while successfully dealt with, hampered the overall health sector efforts.

41. The renewed factional fighting in the hinterland and in Monrovia has worsened the problem of displacement and led to a deterioration in the already saturated population situation. Along with poor sanitary conditions in the displaced centres, there is an increase in the vulnerability of the population to epidemic diseases. Among them are malaria, cholera and measles, identified as the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among all ages, and especially in children. A number of community-based health interventions are being supported by WHO and other organizations to combat this situation.

42. The re-emergence of yellow fever in Liberia in November 1995 resulted in a collaborative undertaking by WHO, UNICEF, the Ministry of Health and some of the international and national non-governmental organizations working in Liberia. A vaccination campaign in Buchanan, where the epidemic was first reported, and other potentially high-risk localities was launched. A total of 1,129,277 persons, or 73.8 per cent of the population, have been immunized. The turnout was high because of the massive public awareness campaigns that had earlier been put into place.

43. The appearance of the Ebola virus on the Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire border in December 1995 became a major concern of the Governments of these two countries. For health surveillance purposes, a joint communiqué was signed by the Ministers of Health of both countries to cooperate in solving this and other health

problems along their common borders. Implementation of this agreement by Liberia has, however, been delayed by insecurity and attendant inaccessibility.

44. In the light of increasing incidents of malaria, acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea, which in some cases reach as high as 60 per cent morbidity in the outpatient departments, WHO has endeavoured to maintain a regular supply of essential drugs to all health centres. In addition, it undertook vector control measures in several accessible parts of the country as a way of minimizing the number of incidents of these diseases.

45. Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) control activities have continued, with the support of WHO to the National AIDS Control Programme of Liberia (NACP). During the reporting period, NACP was involved in public awareness campaigns, education and condom distribution. NACP has, however, been forced to close down as a result of the recent fighting in Monrovia, compelling WHO to take up the direct responsibility of supplying blood safety testing kits to the health facilities.

46. The National Drug Service (NDS), the body that distributed drugs to health facilities, was partially looted during the recent April fighting. WHO and other members of the international community have responded promptly to restore the service of this vital facility through providing fuel and a vehicle for NDS transportation needs.

D. Water and sanitation

47. UNICEF has continued to provide safe drinking water and improve general sanitation. These activities are carried out in collaboration with international and local intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, principally, MSF, Action contre la faim (ACF), the Save the Children Fund (SCF)-United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the African Muslim Agency (AMA), the Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation and the Monrovia City Council. Support to the water sector has continued with rehabilitation, chlorination and digging of wells; installation and repair of hand pumps and, occasionally, trucking water to emergency sites. In addition, UNICEF supports sanitation improvement through health education, animation and provision of tools. In the rural areas, UNICEF is involved in the installation and maintenance of hand pumps and the introduction of improved latrines. In displaced persons' camps, UNICEF supports the provision of safe drinking water and promotes effective and sanitary methods of human waste and garbage disposal.

48. With the opening of the formerly inaccessible areas of Lofa, Grand Gedeh and Sinoe counties towards the end of 1995, UNICEF and its collaborators had extended water and sanitation programmes to those areas. However, these programmes were brought to a halt as a result of mounting insecurity. In Monrovia, water and sanitation programmes were seriously disrupted by the 6 April fighting. In addition to the loss of staff and essential equipment, the desludging trucks were looted. Moreover, overcrowding in the new displaced persons' camps in the safer parts of the town has worsened the situation. When the 31 May ceasefire took effect, UNICEF and its collaborators began the arduous

project of removing garbage and debris from the city centre, as well as beginning massive chlorination of wells. This effort was assisted by food-for-work programmes supported by WFP. The immediate UNICEF objective in this sector now encompasses the following: support and expansion of well chlorination activities; re-establishment and support for health and hygiene education activities in the shelters; repair of hand pumps; resumption of latrine desludging; and continued support for the construction of wells and latrines at the shelters.

E. Education and training

49. Before the April crisis, most of the 1,200 registered schools in Monrovia and its environs were open and many schools in the counties had resumed functioning. However, after the 6 April fighting, all schools in Monrovia have been closed. Schools in the hinterland regions not affected by the fighting continue to function under tenuous circumstances. During the fighting, educational supplies, equipment and materials were looted and educational buildings vandalized. But the greatest blow to education in the city has been the decision of the Catholic Church to close all of its schools until an elected government is in place.

50. In collaboration with LWS and selected local non-governmental organizations, UNICEF supports the free distribution of educational materials. These activities have been designed to encourage schoolchildren and teachers to return to school and to remain there. UNICEF has also continued to support the local non-governmental organization, the Christian Related Education Development Organization (CREDO), to implement a revolving fund project for school supplies and equipment in areas where people could afford to pay fees. About 500 schools in Monrovia and 150 schools in the rest of the country, with a total of 162,500 pupils, were benefiting from the fund.

51. UNICEF has also continued to fund teacher-training workshops, targeting 1,000 primary schoolteachers in areas such as curriculum development and improvement, war trauma counselling, educational psychology, production of educational materials, lesson planning and coping with stress.

52. The curriculum materials centre in Buchanan has continued to receive UNICEF support in providing educational supplies. The centre now caters to 64 schools, with an enrolment of 22,000 pupils and 550 teachers in the city. The local non-governmental organization CREDO, with UNICEF assistance, has established bookstores through parent-teacher's associations to improve access to educational supplies.

F. Specific target groups

1. Refugees and returnees

53. At the end of 1995, UNHCR was providing protection and assistance to 739,500 Liberian refugees in neighbouring west African countries. In Liberia itself, the Office also continued to provide assistance to refugees from Sierra

Leone as well as to Liberian returnees and some 100,000 internally displaced persons. The deteriorating security situation in Liberia has severely limited the assistance provided to refugees and returnees to only those areas controlled by ECOMOG.

54. While no large-scale organized repatriation of Liberian refugees took place during the reporting period, spontaneous repatriation continued despite the volatile political situation. In 1995, UNHCR assisted 9,900 spontaneous returnees. The dramatic increase in spontaneous repatriations from Sierra Leone in 1995 (2,707) over those of 1994 (376) was a direct consequence of the worsening security situation that prevailed in that country during most of 1995. Between January and March 1996, UNHCR in Monrovia had received some 5,555 returnees from various countries of asylum in the region, with the majority being from Guinea. However, the outbreak of renewed fighting, in April and May 1996, especially in Monrovia, has triggered a fresh exodus of refugees from Liberia and has halted further repatriation of Liberians from neighbouring countries.

55. On 7 December 1995, UNHCR held a regional repatriation meeting in order to formulate the strategies for repatriation and reintegration of the Liberian returnees. On 4 January 1996, UNHCR and the Liberian National Transitional Government concluded an agreement establishing the framework for repatriation and reintegration of refugees from neighbouring countries. In addition, the Liberian National Transitional Government signed a declaration on the rights of all Liberians to return to their places of origin or residence in safety and dignity. For this purpose, UNHCR launched an international appeal for US$ 60 million for the repatriation and reintegration of the 739,500 Liberian refugees.

56. The recent round of fighting in Monrovia has, however, blocked the implementation of plans for reintegration and rehabilitation activities and severely curtailed other humanitarian interventions on behalf of refugees and returnees. It is hoped that with the extended deployment of ECOMOG along major roads, such as those leading to Tubmanburg, Bong Mines and Kakata, UNHCR will be in a position to initiate some quick impact projects in returnee areas. This issue also encourages participation in community rehabilitation projects with other relief agencies. Such projects will benefit refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons. A planning figure of 623,000 refugees has been established for the UNHCR repatriation programme and related reintegration activities. This will be reviewed on a regular basis to take account of the evolution of the political situation.

57. UNHCR currently assists whenever the security situation permits. It estimates that there are some 120,000 refugees from Sierra Leone residing in Liberia. The most recent missions to refugee hosting counties, including Lofa, which has not been accessible since December 1993 owing to security problems, were undertaken between February and March 1996. These missions reported widespread malnutrition and a deteriorating health situation. The missions further noted that agricultural activities in many counties had been curtailed, owing to the lack of access to necessary inputs and the fact that most social services were lacking and most administrative infrastructure destroyed. Despite

these security-related problems, the missions noted the presence of small numbers of spontaneous returnees in each county visited.

2. Internally displaced persons

58. The situation regarding internally displaced persons remains precarious. Although there was initial optimism that many of the internally displaced would be able to return to their homes in early 1996, the deteriorating security situation in several areas has made that impossible. Consequently, approximately 800,000 Liberians remain internally displaced. In April and May, an undetermined number were displaced by the fighting in Monrovia, relocating to other areas of the city or to neighbouring countries. Additionally, in June, renewed fighting and harassment in western Liberia contributed to a new influx into the Po River area outside Monrovia.

59. The internally displaced receive food aid from WFP and CRS and benefit from the multisectoral programmes of a number of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. Although some have been absorbed into local communities, approximately 700,000 occupy temporary or permanent camps, some of which are now in areas no longer secure or accessible. Where possible, assistance is provided according to an agreed division of labour among United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and local officials. The United Nations Office for Project Services, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, CRS, SCF-UK, ACF and MSF-International continue to support displaced persons' shelters in their respective areas of speciality.

60. Following the April/May crisis in Monrovia, coordination committees have been re-established to address the needs of the displaced. As previously mentioned, these committees will attempt to ensure an appropriate division of labour in order to provide a rapid and effective response to the needs of the internally displaced.

3. Children in difficult circumstances

61. UNICEF, in collaboration with key ministries such as Planning and Economic Affairs, Health and Social Welfare, Education and Rural Development, as well as a network of local and international non-governmental organizations, continues to provide basic services to children on a national scale. Technical, material and financial support is being provided to develop capacity and meet the needs of children across Liberia. The programme for children in especially difficult circumstances offers social counselling services as well as material assistance to orphanages and institutions caring for abandoned, displaced and refugee children. Tracing families of unaccompanied children and reuniting them are top priorities for UNICEF. This exercise is carried out through the Board of Accreditation of Welfare Institutes. Resettlement packages, including food and non-food items, are given to children who have been reunited with their families.

62. UNICEF also provides support to more than 4,000 orphaned and abandoned children in orphanages in Monrovia. The number of children hosted by orphanages

increased as a result of the April crisis, though many of the additional children are known to be mainly separated from their families rather than orphans. Efforts are being made to reunite them with their families. It is also known that hundreds of children in difficult circumstances are trapped behind battle lines. However, these remain inaccessible to UNICEF.

63. For war trauma counselling, UNICEF has continued its programme with the African Methodist Episcopalian Zion Community College in Monrovia to train counsellors. By the end of 1995, the project had trained over 200 counsellors, reaching more than 10,000 children and women. A further 50 are currently in training. The counsellors come from a cross-section of professions: teachers, nurses, doctors, and community workers and leaders, as well as other caregivers. In addition, plans had been completed for a war-affected youth support (WAYS) project, which aimed at providing literacy, vocational and technical skills to war-affected youths. These projects were to be located at crossroads where youths tend to congregate. Elsewhere, some 1,500 youths in 22 communities have received training in income generation, coupled with literacy programmes and food assistance.

64. UNICEF has also assisted in the training of 20 physiotherapists and orthopaedic assistants, benefiting more than 500 disabled children. Most of these children are between the ages of 7 and 19 and are affected by polio or were disabled in the fighting. UNICEF continues to support the Benedict Menni Rehabilitation Centre for Children, which is a referral centre for the physically handicapped and the disabled in rural areas. However, the work of the orthopaedic workshop of the Centre has been interrupted by the fighting in April.

65. Finally, UNICEF continues to take the lead in highlighting the plight of children and promoting their rights. Workshops on the Convention on the Rights of the Child have been held to sensitize decision makers and members of the Transitional Legislative Assembly. Additionally, UNICEF was in the process of formulating programmes for the expected 10,000 child soldiers during demobilization when fighting broke out in April.

4. The elderly

66. The war has also disrupted structures of society that catered to the needs of the elderly. Hence, elderly people, estimated to be more than 50,000 in population, have been abandoned as a result of the flight of their children or the death of family members. According to assessments conducted in Bong, Nimba, Margibi, Grand Bassa and Montserrado counties, 50 per cent of these abandoned elderly are homeless, while the remaining 50 per cent require special attention and care. There are two local non-governmental organizations, Special Emergency Relief for the Elderly (SERE) and Help Our People Exist (HOPE), catering to the needs of these destitute members of society, with support from United Nations agencies and other international organizations. The services being rendered to these elderly persons have, however, been seriously disrupted by the recent fighting in Monrovia on 6 April.

5. Abused women and girls

67. Women in Liberia continue to bear a disproportionate effect of the war. The loss of their husbands brought with it the additional burden of single parenthood. Many have been tortured, raped and often compelled to witness the killing of an immediate family member. Although the reluctance of such victims to come forward makes it difficult to establish the extent of abuse of women, it is clear that women have borne the main brunt of the war. UNICEF, in collaboration with the National Women's Council of Liberia, has established centres in Monrovia and Buchanan for abused women and girls. The work of these centres, referred to as "My Sister's Place", has ceased as a result of the April fighting.

V. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

68. It is important to emphasize that the achievements described above have been possible in large part because of the efforts of the non-governmental organizations operating in the country. Prior to the 6 April fighting, there were some 13 international and more than 100 national non-governmental organizations serving as invaluable partners to the United Nations agencies. Notwithstanding a lack of resources and limited capacity, a coordination system led by the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office was put in place that organized the complex relationship between the non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, resulting in rapport, cooperation and the maximum use of available resources. The non-governmental organizations have been pioneers in establishing footholds in newly accessed counties and, in the process, have suffered serious losses of their property. All of them have done commendable work.

69. While all international non-governmental organizations were forced to evacuate from Liberia during the fighting in April, they started returning within weeks. All major international non-governmental organizations have now returned. Crucial life-saving work has been carried out by these international non-governmental organizations in the aftermath of the crisis in April and May. In response to continued insecurity, and to avoid a recurrence of the reprehensible looting and disrespect for humanitarian organizations and their mandates, the international non-governmental organizations took the difficult decision of suspending all programmes except life-saving operations, until a more satisfactory working environment has been restored.

VI. ASSISTANCE BY MEMBER STATES AND OTHER DONORS

70. Humanitarian assistance in Liberia is dependent on contributions from the international community. The United Nations consolidated inter-agency appeal, issued on 4 October 1995 and covering the period from September 1995 to August 1996, sought US$ 110,257,853. As at 21 June 1996, contributions amounting to $63,475,430 have been made to the appeal. The response to food sector requirements has been excellent, while support for non-food activities has been weak.

71. During the Conference on Assistance to Liberia, held in New York on 27 October 1995, additional contributions were made supporting the implementation of the Abuja Agreement. A total of $145.7 million was pledged: this figure includes contributions made for the United Nations consolidated inter-agency appeal for Liberia. Additional support was provided to ECOMOG. Among others, the United States of America pledged $10 million for logistical support.

72. On 30 May 1996, the Secretary-General invited Member States and other donors to provide information on assistance extended to Liberia within the framework of General Assembly resolution 50/58 A. Replies were received from the following States.

Australia

73. The Government of Australia contributed 1 million Australian dollars to the WFP appeal for food assistance to assist 464,000 internally displaced persons and Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone.

Denmark

74. The Government of Denmark contributed 7.3 million Danish kroner in humanitarian assistance to Liberia through UNICEF, UNHCR and WHO in 1995. It contributed DKr 15,295,450 to Liberia through UNHCR, WFP and WHO in 1996, as at 24 July. In addition, DKr 1.2 million was channelled through the Adventist Development Relief Agency in 1996.

Finland

75. In 1995, the Government of Finland contributed 1 million markkaa to UNICEF for humanitarian assistance in Liberia. In 1996, Finland has contributed a total of Fmk 1.5 million through WFP, UNICEF and the Finnish Red Cross/ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) as at 30 June 1996.

Germany

76. In 1995, the German Federal Foreign Office and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development disbursed a total of 3,030,000 deutsche mark through various United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. In 1996, the German Federal Foreign Office contributed DM 1,548,000 to various United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations for humanitarian assistance in Liberia and for assistance to Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries.

Italy

77. The Government of Italy contributed to humanitarian assistance in Liberia by: (a) humanitarian flights from the Department of Humanitarian Affairs depot in Pisa to Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, transporting a supply of high-protein biscuits; the Government's financial contribution for transportation from Pisa to Freetown amounted to US$ 75,000; (b) a contribution of $400,000 to UNHCR for emergency operations in favour of Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire.

Japan

78. From 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996, the Government of Japan provided US$ 6 million in humanitarian assistance to Liberia through UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC and the International Organization for Migration. In addition, $10,870,000 was provided for emergency food aid for the refugees and internally displaced persons in Liberia and Sierra Leone through WFP.

Liechtenstein

79. The Government of Liechtenstein responded to the United Nations consolidated inter-agency appeal by making a financial contribution of 10,000 Swiss francs in February 1996 in order to facilitate the restoration of peace and normalcy in Liberia.

Norway

80. During 1996, the Government of Norway disbursed 12,673,798 Norwegian kroner in assistance to Liberia, as at 11 July. Assistance was channelled through WFP, Caritas Norway, MSF-Oslo, Norwegian Church Aid and the Norwegian Red Cross.

Switzerland

81. The Government of Switzerland contributed SwF 2,265,000 for humanitarian assistance to Liberia through UNHCR, WFP and MSF-Switzerland.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

82. In 1996, the United Kingdom provided nearly 3 million pounds sterling in emergency disaster relief to Liberia, largely to United Nations agencies, IFRC and non-governmental organizations.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

83. The humanitarian situation in Liberia has not changed significantly since the previous report (A/50/522). More than 1.5 million of Liberia's people remain dependent on relief aid as refugees, displaced persons and those affected by various aspects of the war. Under the present circumstances of continuing uncertainty and volatility, requisite humanitarian assistance cannot be delivered according to the pre-established plan of moving from relief to sustainable development. Nevertheless, the humanitarian assistance community has endeavoured to undertake a number of assessments and matched those assessed needs to available resources. The thrust of the activities of the humanitarian community remains the collective endeavour to access all people and consequently avert any large-scale humanitarian disaster. This has been achieved so far with a great deal of success despite continuing conflict and the attendant insecurity.

84. Mainly owing to the persistent efforts of the humanitarian community, there has been no large-scale starvation in the country. The high rate of malnutrition in Bong county and elsewhere was swiftly brought down through a

concerted food aid programme. Contagious epidemics of cholera, yellow fever and Ebola virus were effectively controlled. Clean drinking water and medical supplies were available in most accessible areas. Shelter has also been made available to more than 400,000 people, while numerous camps and feeding centres were established in many parts of the country to cater to the vulnerable. Additionally, an increasing number of internally displaced persons were engaged in income-generating activities.

85. The ceasefire proffered by the Abuja Agreement in August 1995 and the attendant relative tranquillity at the time greatly enhanced the ability of the humanitarian assistance community to operate in hitherto inaccessible parts of the country. Landmark achievements were registered: for example, for the first time in more than a year, relief convoys reached Zwedru and Voinjama respectively, between 14 November and 6 December 1995. After subsisting on wild fruits and herbal medicine for a long period of time, the food and medical situation for these communities was significantly improved by the arrival of relief supplies with the humanitarian convoy. Members of the humanitarian assistance community simultaneously moved in and established footholds in Zwedru (WVI), Greenville (MSF/F, OXFAM) Voinjama (OXFAM, MSF-Belgium) and Rivercess (Calvary Chapel). Concurrently, a framework for the resettlement and reintegration of refugees, displaced persons and ex-combatants was formulated in consultation with the relevant government agencies and submitted to the Liberian National Transitional Government for approval.

86. These positive developments were undertaken despite a volatile security and political situation that persisted in the hinterland and in Monrovia. The fighting in Monrovia in April and May further revealed the blatant disrespect of the factions for the humanitarian assistance community. The wholesale looting and destruction of property, estimated to be in the tens of million of dollars, has crippled and decimated the activities of the humanitarian community to the extent that any serious attempt aimed at bringing programmes to the pre-April 1996 level would have to entail massive reinvestment in all areas of humanitarian endeavours. In view of these transgressions, the humanitarian assistance community, and particularly the non-governmental organizations, have taken the stand of limiting their operations to life-saving activities, using existing resources only.

87. Humanitarian assistance in Liberia is now at the crossroads. Short-term concerns are likely to continue to overwhelm humanitarian programmes. It must also be noted that resource mobilization has become more problematic. While the present deployment of humanitarian organizations can address immediate and small-scale emergencies, it is inadequately equipped and staffed to respond effectively to any major emergencies, epidemics or disasters. In spite of these difficulties, the humanitarian assistance community has not entertained the idea of a complete withdrawal. The humanitarian community has seized every opportunity to emphasize its commitment to continuing relief assistance within the Principles and Protocols of Humanitarian Operations. It is now hoped that the ongoing political efforts of the international community and, in particular, ECOWAS will be successful, and that faction leaders will fulfil their commitment, announced in August 1996, to the complete cessation of hostilities and the disarmament of their forces.